

LEADERSHIP LEARNING GUIDE / EPISODE 9

The Leadership Mistake That Cost Us More Than Money

Topic: Employee involvement, decision-making and earning buy-in
Audience: Leadership, management and organizational behavior courses

ABOUT THE EPISODE

A major manufacturing redesign required moving enormous machines and investing substantial time and money. Yet the new cells fell short of expectations. Pete reflects on a critical leadership oversight: decisions were made before the people doing the work had a meaningful opportunity to contribute.

Involve people before decisions are made, not after.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After watching, students should be able to:

- Explain why employee buy-in must be earned during decision-making.
- Describe how frontline experience can improve plans before implementation.
- Distinguish participation and ownership from compliance with instructions.
- Identify practical ways to involve employees in organizational change.

FOUR PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Ask early. Involve the people affected before finalizing the plan.
2. Listen seriously. Use frontline knowledge to test assumptions.
3. Explain decisions. Share constraints, reasons and trade-offs openly.
4. Build ownership. Give people a genuine opportunity to contribute.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did the project team overlook before moving the machines?
2. Why might employees resist a technically sound change?
3. How could the manager have involved operators during planning?
4. Must every employee suggestion be adopted to earn buy-in?
5. How would you measure whether employees feel ownership?

FIVE-MINUTE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / ASK BEFORE YOU ACT

In pairs, imagine your team must redesign a work area next month. Write three questions to ask the operators before approving the layout. Then identify one way to explain a decision when an employee's suggestion cannot be adopted.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Good leadership does not require adopting every suggestion. It requires inviting input while choices are still being made, explaining decisions and treating employees' experience with respect.

ONE CREATES RESISTANCE. THE OTHER CREATES OWNERSHIP.

WATCH EPISODE 9

https://youtu.be/sXhW4PAWXVY

Watch on YouTube.

Scan the code to watch on YouTube.

Companion resource: Pete Maher's The Lean Leader's Playbook: Guiding Teams to Excellence Through Empowerment and Effective Leadership is available on Amazon in Kindle, paperback and hardcover editions.